



2024 Downtown Development Authority Board

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2024 Annual Synopsis

This annual synopsis of the projects and activities of the Downtown Development Authority is prepared to satisfy the reporting requirements of the Tax Increment Financing Act, Public Act 57 of 2018.

As the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) was formed in 2019, there are no revenues that have been accumulated for five or more years at this point to address as to when they will be expended. With 2022 tax increment capture, the DDA has now collected revenues for five years. There were no land investments by the DDA to report for 2024.

The Downtown Development Director's responsibilities work toward implementation three key plans including the Downtown Development Plan adopted by the Township Board in 2019 and the Comstock Center Place Plan for Prosperity and Redevelopment and the 2022 Economic Development, Marketing & Branding Strategy.

One new Board member was appointed to the DDA in 2024. Andrew Schippers, owner of property in the DDA District, was approved by the Township Board. The DDA Director worked with the executive Committee to encouraged more efficiency and involvement of the Board members. The DDA has reconfirmed the focus and priorities of their four committees. The four committees are Beautification, Maintenance & Infrastructure, Economic Development, Marketing & Outreach, Events /Special Programs and Executive.

Projects and Activities of the DDA

The Downtown Development Plan spans 30 years. The year 2024 was the sixth of this 30-year plan. First steps toward improving the overall appearance of and reminding the community that Comstock Center matters and is worth revitalizing got underway in 2020 as the *Beautify Comstock Center* initiative. In 2024, significant work to expand and enhance the appearance of the district streets and entryways. Highlights of 2024 include:

Beautification, Maintenance & Infrastructure

- ❖ 2024 was the fifth year the welcome banners hung on poles in Comstock Center. The thirty banners are seasonally themed and swapped out for fall, winter and spring/summer.
- ❖ *Beautify Comstock Center* initiative annual installation and maintenance the five gateway signs and reinstallation of 30 attractive planters near downtown intersections and business. The addition of 6 new planters were installed in the Spring of 2024. The Kalamazoo River bridge was redecorated with 20 flower baskets along the railings improving the pedestrian walkway on each side of the bridge. The DDA purchase a security camera to help monitor and deter vandalism of the baskets.
- ❖ The *Beautify Comstock Center* initiative continues to receive support by Comstock Township greenhouse businesses. River Street Flowerland. Wenke Greenhouse and Sportel Greenhouse all donated products and services to help beautify the district.
- ❖ Maintenance of the downtown district was improved with the DDA continuing the second year of a 3-year contract with MowCo., a local landscape firm, to water, weed, maintain the gateways, planters and bridge areas.
- ❖ DDA staff continued weekly tours of the district to visit district businesses and monitor streetscape infrastructure and furnishings.
- ❖ The DDA purchase an additional four trash containers for the placement at key locations to encourage cleanup of King Hwy. and River St. streetscapes. A local business owner helps to empty and maintain the containers. Trash along the sidewalks has decreased significantly in 2024.

Events /Special Programs

- ❖ The DDA participated in the National Night Out Event in August at Merrill Park. A local business donated funds for free food and drink. Attendance was approximately 100 people.
- ❖ The Comstock Center DDA with support from the Comstock Township Parks and Recreation Department and Michigan Waterways Stewards implemented a new summer event in July at Merrill Park. Paddle and Pour Summer Festival was created to draw people to the district for a summer evening focused on Kalamazoo River kayaking and non-alcoholic specialty drinks. Music and food were also offered. Approximately 200 people attended.
- ❖ The DDA partnered again with Comstock Parks and Recreation to hold the 3rd Fall Fest at Merrill Park in September. The significant expansion of food, music, games and family activities resulted in the tripling of attendance to 250.
- ❖ The renovated historical-themed mural located at King Hwy. and River St. Landscape planters and Holiday lighting were installed to highlight the mural.

Economic Development, Marketing & Outreach

- ❖ 2024 was an active year for the DDA Board related to economic development. The 2019 Place Plan was updated through the financial support of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) Redevelopment Ready Community grants. The project target area called Riverfront Redevelopment Project, and it remains to be the priority economic redevelopment site located at the SE corner of King and River St. It includes the enhancement of the Kalamazoo River walkways and connection, access to the Kalamazoo River Trailway and streetscape improvements throughout the district.
- ❖ Kalamazoo County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority awarded the Township a grant of \$32,000 for environmental studies of the Riverfront Redevelopment Plan area. Phase I and II environmental site assessments were completed. Results of the assessments indicated no significant environmental concerns which would deter development on the 2-acre site, containing ten privately owned parcels.
- ❖ The MEDC grant funds also allow the DDA to implement a retail and residential market assessment. These studies were completed in June of 2024. The studies indicated that Comstock Center could support 80 new residential units and over 40,000 sq. feet of targeted commercial uses.

- ❖ The Comstock Center Façade Improvement Program was rolled out to eight district businesses to assist with renovations and repairs to their storefronts. Through a combination of DDA funds and a grant from ITC Company a budget of \$15,000 has been created to offer a 50% reimbursable grant for signage, window, door and brickwork and outdoor seating improvements. The DDA Board expanded the program to include murals placed on prominent walls on key buildings downtown. The program assisted two local businesses in 2024 with grants for new signage and awnings.

Executive Committee

- ❖ The Executive Committee, among other tasks, serves as the sounding board for initiatives the Director may undertake, reviewing bylaws and creating new policies and strategies to help lead the full board. The DDA Board was successful in filling the vacant resident opening (Keith Wilcher) on the Board. In December, the DDA also welcomed the new Township Supervisor, Ben Martin, to the Board.
- ❖ The DDA Executive Committee acted as the Riverfront Redevelopment Project Team to begin seeking support and funding to implement the next step of the project including potential negotiations for land acquisition. Requests were made to the Township Board for an additional Plan funding Township CIP and ARPA funding program in early 2024. The Township recommended we come back once we have made further progress on details of the plan.
- ❖ A purchase offer was made on 3 of the key parcels in the project area. Unfortunately, the offer was rejected. Negotiations to purchase continued throughout 2024.
- ❖ The DDA was successful in receiving a \$100,000 Irving S. Gilmore Foundation grant for land acquisition and riverfront enhancement design. The Grant requires the DDA to raise an additional \$45,000 local match to secure the full \$100,000. Fundraising began in October with Board members reaching out to local businesses and residents.
- ❖ The DDA Board and Township Board held a joint public meeting in October to present the revised Riverfront Redevelopment Concept Plan. The DDA Board, the DDA Director and DDA consultants presented the revised site plan, and the results of the two market studies to a full house with broad community comment. The DDA and Township approved a Resolution of Support for the Plan.
- ❖ The DDA Director has provided technical support to a local developer who is renovating a former community center into four affordable residential lofts. Completion is planned for summer 2025.
- ❖ The DDA is working closely with the Township administration to prepare a community Housing Plan. One specific goal is to create a owner-occupied rehab program to help the

core neighborhoods surrounding Comstock Center DDA District with improvements for roofing, windows and weatherization.